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neighbors paying friendly visits and of playing children gradually become stilled. It is the time for the evening meal. By nine o'clock at the latest all is quiet and Mirebalais, man and beast, is asleep.

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The vodun drums are heard only on Saturday nights, and then the dance must be sufficiently close to the town, and the wind in the right direction, for the sound to be audible.

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Permits for these dances must be obtained, and are regularly given by the police officials — or were in 1934 — and word is passed on that on a given Saturday certain households will give vodun dances. If the dances are held in the foothills to the west, the Tombe River must be forded, and the existence of such a barrier between the village and the site of the dance makes this a favorite region in which to hold them, even though they may have official sanction. During the rainy season attendance at dances on the opposite bank of the Artibonite River depends on the height of the stream, for when it is in flood not even the dugout canoes of the Haitians can cross it, while the ferry which Moreau de St. Mery speaks of as having been established in 1749 does not even exist in local tradition.²⁴ Yet no dance lacks participants or spectators, for these occasions furnish the principal opportunity for recreation even as they fill their proper religious function. Early in the week discussions can be heard of the dances to be held, and though the official frown of the Catholic priest is always to be reckoned with, the importance of these dances, and the numbers who attend them, do not seem markedly lessened by this fact. Those whose social position in the community makes

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them more sensitive to such criticism merely take the precaution to slip quietly out of town after dark.

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When occasions of local or national significance and church holidays are celebrated, the town is full of country folk and visitors from the cities. Christmas and New Year's, Mardi Gras and Easter are all periods for such celebrations, while the first Sunday of every month witnesses a religious procession

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metous contemporary accounts, and most present-day works, give both texts and illustrations which make the economy of the plantation clear.²³ Though many stories of the magnificence of plantation life are found in current works, writers of the period seem to agree that but little attention was paid to convenience. Inventories of the contents of houses show that furnishings were at a minimum; a few chairs and small tables in the sitting- and reception-rooms, beds and minor accessories in the way of furniture in the bedrooms, dining-room tables and chairs and a cabinet for dishes. These pieces were usually built in the colony and made of native hard woods; substantial, they were essentially plain. As Baron Wimpffen remarked, "Taste, Sir, is still Creolian at Saint Domingo; and, unfortunately, the Creolian is not the right taste, — it smells too much of the *Boscan*."²⁴

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The table set was not distinguished. Meat, though the most important dish at the principal meals, was poor, but, on the other hand, fish, game, and wild fowl were excellent, and the best of French wines were available.²⁴ Whatever the fare, however, it was served in the grand manner, often on plate rather than chinaware, and by the many liveried house-servants which every great establishment could boast. An account of the mode of service has been preserved in the reminiscences of one who, writing some years later of a repast served him in 1787, says: "There were many more of these domestics of both sexes than there were diners. I could but admire their attention to the smallest details of the service, the whiteness of their clothing, and the beautiful kerchiefs in the *Créole* manner elegantly arranged about the heads of the women. . . . But (24) all of them moved about on bare feet; this was the distinctive sign of slavery."²⁵

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As portrayed in contemporary works, Haitian white life is seen to have been lived enaively in terms of material goods and of display. Just as there was little intellectual life, so religion was but a matter of form. One M. de Larnage, writing from

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CHAPTER IV

THE SETTING OF HAITIAN LIFE

Since the discovery by the Spaniards that the wealth of Haiti lay rather in cultivating sugar than in the exploitation of gold mines, its dominant economy has been agricultural. In the valley of Mirebalais, as elsewhere in the island, the small cultivator holds the center of the economic stage. In the main he works his own land, inherited from his father or acquired through purchase. He may also cultivate additional plots of ground which he rents, since much of the land expropriated when independence was gained was retained by the State and today is leased for nominal fees.¹

The life of the Haitian farmer, though hard, is simple and self-contained. With but few exceptions, he supplies all his necessities, for he commands almost the entire range of techniques known to his culture; hence Haitian economy shows a lack of specialization that in the main is only relieved by the sex division of labor. The day's work begins at dawn, the women rising before the men to prepare coffee, the invariable drink of early morning. When finished with his breakfast, the farmer goes to his field, where, except for the hottest hours, he works until sundown, his one meal being brought to him at about nine or ten o'clock in the morning. His wife meanwhile occupies herself with her household tasks, pounding grain in her mortar or working in her garden near by.

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512 grain in her mortar or working in her garden near by. On
[143] market days she takes the produce of the family's fields to the
[138] town to sell. If she has young children, she cares for them
[155] while she does her other work, but when they are old enough,
[157] they help her about the house if they are girls, or, if boys, go
with their father to the garden. From time to time, when
house repairs are needed or there are implements to be
mended, the man spends a day at home getting these odd
jobs done; otherwise only serious illness in the family keeps
him from his fields.

512 The times for meals have not varied since the days when
[24] Moreau de St. Mery described the eating-habits of the slaves.*
In addition to the mid-morning repast, the only other meal
is that eaten after the man returns from his field, this being
the largest of the day. A wife does not sit down with her
husband, but usually eats earlier with her small children and
holds herself ready to serve him upon his return, when, if he
is alone, she remains to tell him the day's gossip. Visitors are
often present, for peasant etiquette demands that all comers
be offered food, and, as one Haitian expressed it, "The peasant
would kill you for the insult if you did not share your
meal with him." Bedtime, as might be expected, is early.

512 On Sundays and on the days of festivals this routine is in-
[52] interrupted, when, if the occasion is of sufficient importance
[196] and the habitation is not too far from town, the peasant and
his family attend mass. On Saturday nights there is usually a
voodoo dance, when the early hour for retirement is forgotten
and all-night festivities precede Sunday's rest. On such days
[264] the principal meal is eaten at three or four o'clock in the
afternoon, and all the adults share it together, while at one
side the children are fed from the dishes of their parents in
response to the insistent repetition of the demand "Ba'm
pa'm — give me my portion."*

* This is an example of the effusion characteristic of Haitian Creole, it being abbreviated from *Be moin part moin ou, in French, Donnez-moi ma part.*

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fact that a family will often strike out for itself, deserting the parental home, show a European independence foreign to native African thought. Yet the arrangement of meal-times, and the fact that a wife rarely eats with her husband, are African, as are the modes of correction, especially the feeling that flogging with a stick is the best disciplinary method. Indeed, the characteristic snap of the fingers employed by the Haitian to indicate a beating is exactly that which is used in Dahomey to signify beheading! In the attitude toward children African traditions have been warped by European custom, which has introduced a certain hardness of feeling that, whatever the cost, children must be brought in line with social convention, together with a resulting harshness of treatment that is anything but African.

Another important facet of Haitian life in which the effect of contact is telling includes art and recreational activities. Perhaps because of the conditions of slavery, or the difficulties of life after independence had been attained, much of these forms of African tradition has been lost, not to be replaced by corresponding borrowings from European sources. Wood-carving, an outstanding element in the æsthetic life of West Africa, is almost entirely absent. Near Mirebalais lives a man who can carve a pipe in the likeness of a human face, but there is no similarity between the products of his craft and West African figurines or masks, and he is thought of as an unusual person whose carving is an interesting but not socially significant avocation. It was stated, though without adequate corroboration, that before the Marine occupation Mirebalais boasted vodun drums on which heads "like the ones on these pipes" had been carved. Today the only form of decorative work in wood to be seen is the scroll-work designs which act as ventilating devices over doorways. They are done with the figures of the carpenters, and no fertility of conception or felicity in composition marks these artistically crude efforts.

Other African crafts, which, though essentially utilitarian

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compensated by a "feast" and party given at the end of the day by the host. More usual than the *corvée* is the regular sharing of work on one another's fields—the *roule*, or "taking turns."

An early morning work gathering is known as a *dourant jou*. It meets early in the day, sometimes before dawn, continues until ten or eleven in the morning, when the sun becomes hot, and then disperses. An afternoon coumbite is called a *dîné-machete* (dinner machete) and lasts from about two in the afternoon until early evening. When the work is finished, the men go to the house of the host, where they have dinner, much in the manner of the American threshing party. An all-day affair is called a grand coumbite.

Essential to all coumbites are musicians and singing leaders. The instruments used are various, according to local custom. In the south they are usually drums, *tymbales*, and bamboo trumpets. In some areas of the north, the *lambi*, or conch-shell trumpet, is favored.

According to the custom in the south, on the day of the coumbite the drummers arise in the false dawn before sunrise and begin a round-about march to the house of the host. They pass before the huts of all the neighbors who are going to join the party, playing a *rappel* on the drums. By one's and two's the workers come down the trails to join the procession, bringing hoes, machetes, or sickles as required. As the marching group grows larger, there is talking, laughter, and perhaps singing. Most of the men who join the procession are from close by. Others who may have to travel from a distance, perhaps from the next valley, go directly to the house of the host. When the workers arrive there, the women of the house serve coffee. This is the usual breakfast of the Haitian peasant.

Then the drummers play another *rappel*, and the men go down to the field that is to be tilled. There may be ten, twenty, or fifty of them. Some coumbites are even larger. If the group is a small one, the men line up together. The singing leader, called a *samba* or *simidor*, begins a song, the drummers play, the hoes begin to rise and fall in unison, and the workers join in the singing. If the group is large it will divide into two or three squads, each trying to outdo the other. The men stand shoulder to shoulder, moving the hoes up and down together, synchronizing their movements by pauses as they sing their responsive parts. Sometimes tafia or rum is portioned out. The squads move forward slowly, inching their way across the field. The samba beats on his hoe blade with a stone to keep time for his song. His job is to "encourage" the men. He may sing old familiar songs or compose new ones, songs with humor and bite in them, ribald songs, and songs of ridicule. They may criticize